

*An ancient Assamese Fortification and the Legends relating thereto.—By*

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(With Plates IV and V.)

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The North Bank of the Brahmaputra in Assam has been explored for the remains of the older kingdoms and civilisations in many places by Colonel Hannay, who worked in the district lying East and North of Dibrugarh, and in 1848 described the forts ascribed to Raja Bishmukh, near Sadiya, and by Captain Dalton, whose explorations along the base of the Himalayas led to the discovery of a considerable number of remains of archæological interest. In particular was this the case with the fortifications which he found in the jungle on the banks of the Buroi river some miles before it emerges into the plains of Assam from the Himalayas.

His description<sup>1</sup> of these fortifications runs as follows:—

“The mud forts are of considerable size, with lofty ramparts and deep ditches, and having tanks of good water within the defences. That nearest the village of Gomiri has, raised above its ramparts, high mounds of earth which may have been constructed over the graves of deceased kings and used also as watch towers. The broad roads are well thrown up, and as they lead from the Berhampooter to the gorge of the Burhoi, they show that the settlement in the low hills on the banks of that river, of which a high stone wall is all that remains, must have been of considerable importance. The massiveness of the wall, and the labour and trouble that seem to have been bestowed upon it point to it as having been the appendage of no mean work. It is about a hundred yards in length, of great breadth, and built of solid blocks of stone squared and piled with great nicety. A gateway in the centre opens towards the river. In some places, the interior is faced with brick, and seems as if buildings of that material had been built against it. The hill has been levelled to some extent, but no further traces of buildings are now discernible.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the *Calcutta Review*.



FIG. 1.—BUROI FORTIFICATIONS (ASSAM).

No. 1.



FIG. 2.—BUROI FORTIFICATIONS (ASSAM).

No. 2.





FIG. 1.—BUROI FORTIFICATIONS (ASSAM).  
No. 3.



FIG. 2.—CLIFF AT NORTH END OF BUROI  
FORTIFICATIONS (ASSAM).



“About a mile higher up, there is a cave on the left bank of the river, which is said to have been constructed by the king for devotional purposes. The river having forced its way into this cave, has carried away a considerable portion of it, and its appearance is doubtless very much altered from what it was; but in its present condition, there is no reason for supposing it to be a work of art.

“Above this again, at a considerable elevation on the side of the mountain, there is a natural niche in the bare rock, and above it a mass which from the river appears to the naked eye to be a group of figures with as much resemblance to humanity as idols generally possess. The only people now frequenting this region—the gold-washers—believe them to be gods, and worship them as such; and being in view of the cave, if the latter ever was used as a place of worship, it may have been for the adoration of these gigantic figures. A telescope dissolves the illusion of their bearing any resemblance to gods or mortals, and of course a closer inspection would do the same. But no one has ever ventured to approach the phenomenon, and if they did, they would consider the reality as the illusion, and report with some truth that the mysterious figure blended into the mass of rock as they approached, and consequently that a closer inspection of their awful forms than that obtained from the view at the cave, was not given to mortal eyes.”

After their discovery by Captain Dalton, the knowledge of the existence of these forts had wholly disappeared among the local planters, and even among the Assamese, and it was not until one of the authors, while shooting in the forest near the Buroi river, was fortunate enough to stumble across them, that any knowledge of them existed in the district. As we have been able to bring a considerable amount of new information to light, both as regards the fortifications themselves, and as to the legends relating to them, it has seemed worth while to bring the whole information on the matter together.

The River Buroi is a short river draining a portion of the lower Himalayas in the district of Darrang in Assam, and while still in the hills passes through country inhabited by the Mongolian tribe of Daphlas. It finally enters the Brahmaputra, a little to the east of Behāli Mukh. For the greater part of the year the upper river is only approachable by a road which runs right back from the river at Gomiri Ghat to the hills, and then by a path along their base through the Singli Tea Estate. This path is shown as the “Singli Path” in the rough sketch in Fig. 1. During the greater part of the early months of the year it is however also possible to approach this part of the river by elephant along the banks of the river, and also with some difficulty on horseback.

**PLAN OF THE FORTIFICATION ON THE BUROI.**

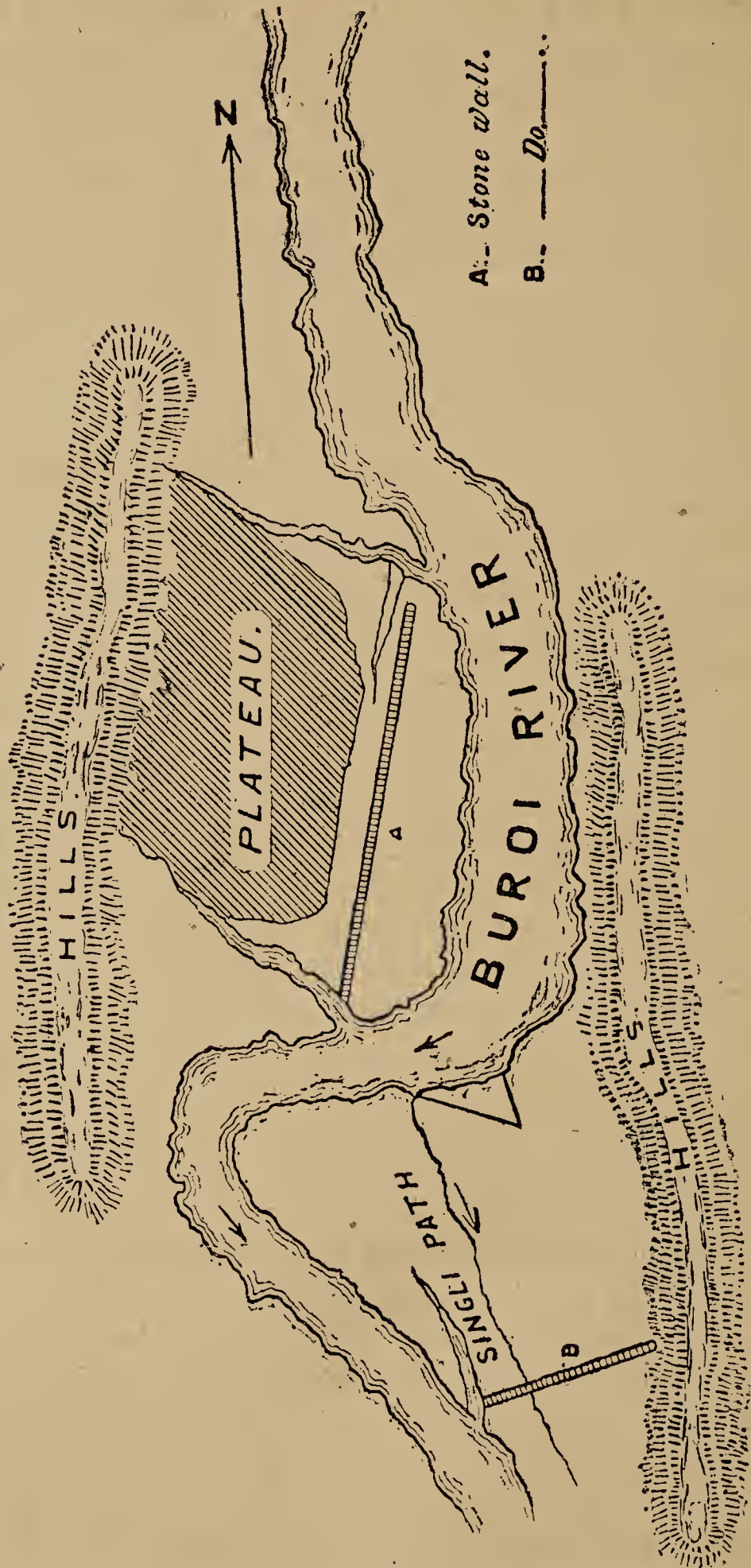


Fig. 1.

The fortifications of which we speak are situated just over the boundary line of British territory in the independent Daphla country.

in Lat.  $26^{\circ} 57' N.$  and Long.  $93^{\circ} 28' E.$ <sup>1</sup> They consist now of two long walls situated as shown in the sketch map. That marked A which is by far the longest, consists of a long continuous barrier made of faced sandstone blocks, put together with great precision. The general character of this wall is shown in the accompanying photographs (see Plates V and IV) which we were able to procure. Plate IV, No. 1 shows most clearly the accuracy with which the stones are keyed into one another.

This wall was some ten feet in thickness, and the inside appeared to be filled in with ordinary river stones, without any arrangement. It ran from N.E. to S.W. or nearly so, and commanded the right bank of the river. It was from its arrangement and structure evidently used as a fortification against the plains, as while it was protected most completely on the South side, it lay almost entirely open from the hills. The North end was protected by the sheer cliff on the opposite bank of the river shown in Plate IV, No. 2.

The place is difficult of access, and in part buried in cane jungle. On a second visit, when there was more leisure to examine the whole situation and material of the fortification, it was found to be three hundred yards long, and a very large number of the blocks of stone of which it is composed, on being cleared showed marks, which we take to be builder's marks, cut deeply into the sandstone, and always on the outside face. Some of these marks are shown in the accompanying diagram, (which does not of course represent an actual group of

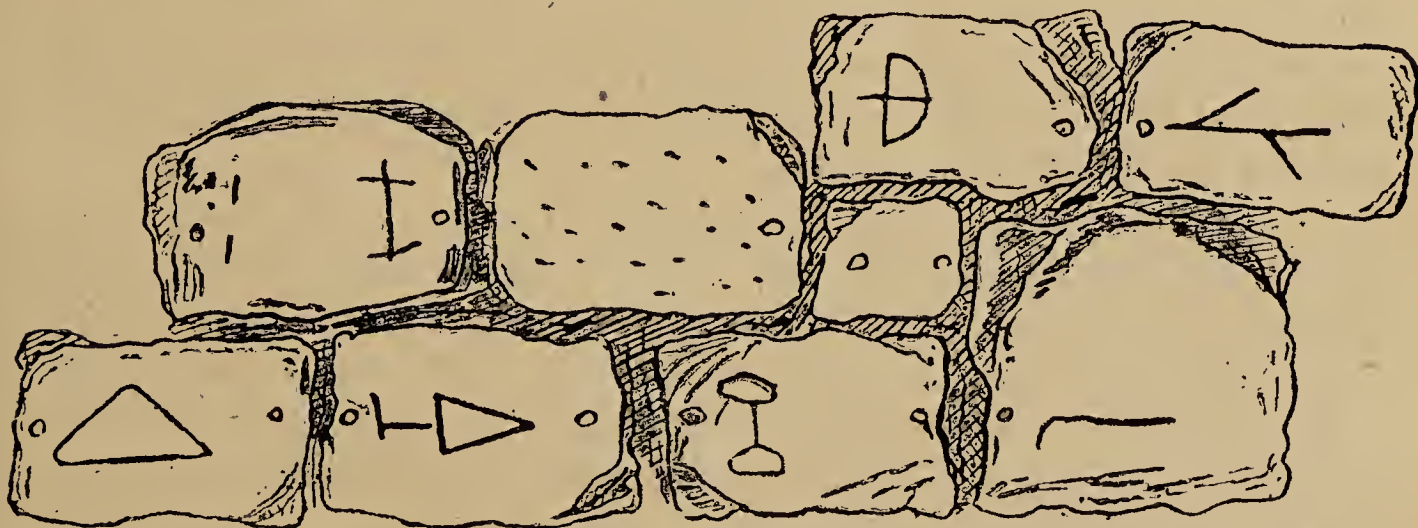


Fig. 2. Marks found on stones in the Buroi fortifications.

marks but is purely diagrammatic). That to the left hand on the top row is by far the most common. It is a curious point to note that some of these same marks were found on the worked stones at Rājā Bhīṣmaka's temple near Sadiya by Colonel Haunay, in 1848, indicating

<sup>1</sup> On the same basis for Madras as is used in the Survey Maps of Assam.